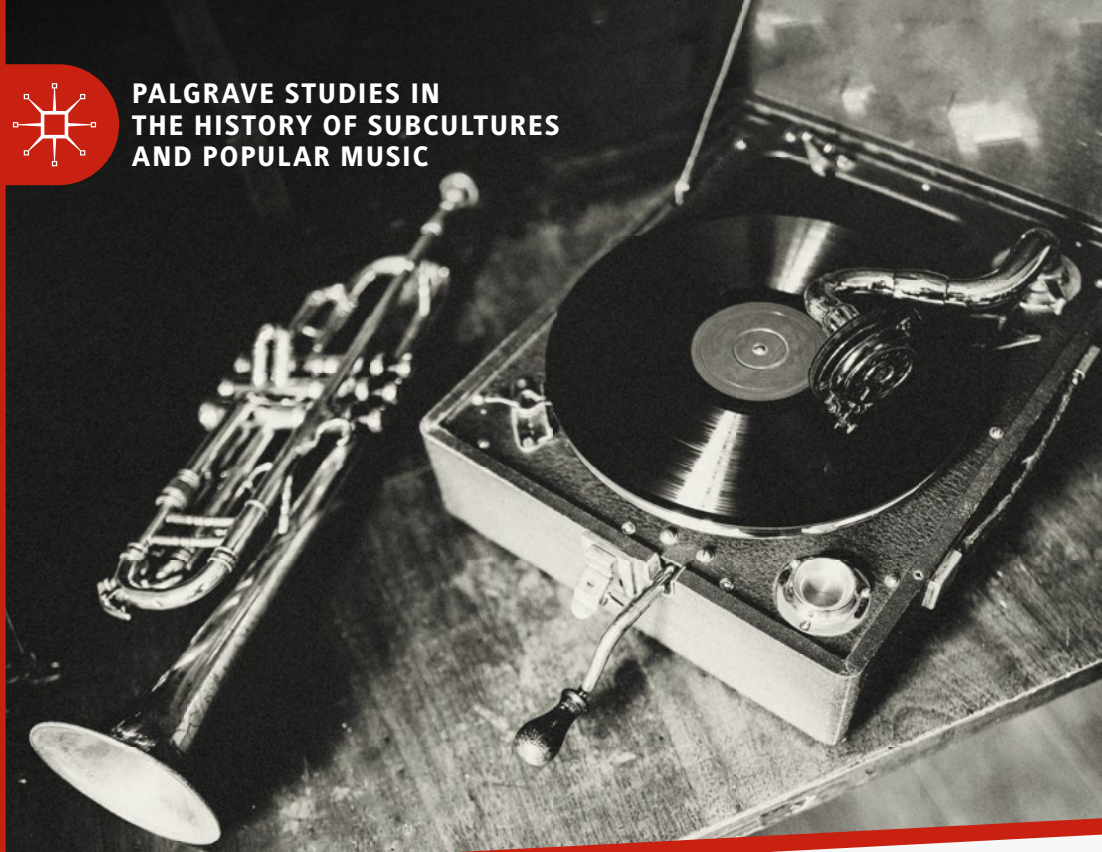

PALGRAVE STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF SUBCULTURES AND POPULAR MUSIC

Ray Kinsella

The Bebop Scene in London's Soho, 1945–1950

Post-war Britain's First Youth Subculture

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Palgrave Studies in the History of Subcultures and Popular Music

From 1940s zoot-suiters and hepcats through 1950s rock 'n' rollers, beatniks and Teddy boys; 1960s surfers, rude boys, mods, hippies and bikers; 1970s skinheads, soul boys, rastas, glam rockers, funksters and punks; on to the heavy metal, hip-hop, casual, goth, rave and clubber styles of the 1980s, 90s, noughties and beyond, distinctive blends of fashion and music have become a defining feature of the cultural landscape. The Subcultures Network series is international in scope and designed to explore the social and political implications of subcultural forms. Youth and subcultures will be located in their historical, socio-economic and cultural context; the motivations and meanings applied to the aesthetics, actions and manifestations of youth and subculture will be assessed. The objective is to facilitate a genuinely cross-disciplinary and transnational outlet for a burgeoning area of academic study.

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THE BEBOP SCENE

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1919

Jazz arrives in Britain from America

1939

Outbreak of WWII

1942

African American servicemen and US Army swing bands enter Britain and descend on Soho

1945

End of WWII
First bebop records arrive in Britain
Musicians begin playing bebop at the Fullado Club

1946

Cecil Gee's Outfitters opens
Paramount Dance Hall introduces bebop

1947

Independent tailors start producing bebop clothing
Launch of Britain's first bebop label, Esquire Records
Beboppers begin making transatlantic journey's to New York
Fullado Club raided by police and closed down
David's Menswear shop opens

1948

Surge in Trad jazz
SS Windrush arrives at Tilbury from Jamaica
Beboppers start playing in other bands in various west end clubs
Feldman Club hosts bebop nights on Sundays
Metropolitan Bopera House opens and closes
Club Eleven opens

1950

Bebop goes suburban then nationwide
Club Eleven raided by police and closed down
Paramount Dance Hall raided by police and closed down
Bebop banned by Wimbledon Palais
Bebop banned by BBC

1951

Studio '51 opens and closes
Williams' Menswear shop opens

1952

Flamingo Club opens

1955-1964

The birth of the teenager
Rock and roll enters Britain
Bill Haley and the Comets' film, Rock around the Clock, shown in British cinemas
Ronnie Scott and Pete King open up bebop club, Ronnie Scott's
The Beatles and Rolling Stones record their first albums
Bill Haley and the Comets play first London gigs
The rise of skiffle and trad-jazz
The rise of Tin Pan Alley

Timeline: The Bebop Scene

To my brother John—taken from us far too early. You have been a guiding light throughout my laborious journey trudging the rocky road of adult education.
Rest in Peace.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Overview

This book tells the hidden history of the bebop scene in post-war Soho, London, and maps its humble beginnings in late 1945 to the point at which it sparked a moral panic in 1950. Via an exploration of the intersection of race, class and gender, it demonstrates how the scene first came into existence and then developed in the underground spaces of Soho in the aftermath of Second World War, amidst the bomb-blasted landscape.

This is a history from below, and though there are a few musicians in the story that are relatively well known, the narrative gives voice to many of its social actors that have remained unheard until now. The book details the hybrid identities that were created by these protagonists through their distinct blend of music, fashion and transracial fraternisation across gender. More than this, though, the story examines the social and political impacts of these identities on society in the post-war years. In other words, it assesses the culturally transformative significance of beboppers—not only in their influence on subsequent youth subcultures but also their reception by the media, the development of popular culture more generally and, crucially, Soho's role in this during the 1950s. Classic notions of subculture, then, will be utilised, as will Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the carnivalesque, which will help shed light on the transgressive social and cultural nature of post-war Soho.

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The story is as much about movement and migration as it is about cultural hybridity and improvisation. I therefore make use of Paul Gilroy's concept of the 'Black Atlantic' and Fernando Ortiz's notion of 'transculturation', employing them throughout the book. These conceptions are highly important for critically illuminating the rich tapestry that is woven when the various cultures in the narrative come together and amalgamate.

Simultaneously, though, the book reveals a parallel narrative about political nationalism and imperial hegemony, and explores the ways in which the establishment wielded power over the rebellious social actors constructing these brand new post-war identities. In this respect, cultural theorists Stuart Hall, Stanley Cohen and Nachman Ben-Yehuda are all important for media analysis and for questioning the role of the dissemination of the bebop scene in the media.

Key Terms: Definitions

A number of key terms are applied throughout this book. Andy Bennett has defined a 'scene' as 'the context in which clusters of producers, musicians, and fans collectively share their common musical tastes and collectively distinguish themselves from others'.[1] Bennett's definition is suitable for this research as it reflects the way in which the bebop scene in post-war Soho operated. In terms of 'subculture', Hebdige's notion that 'subcultures cobble together (or hybridize) styles out of the images and material culture available to them in the effort to construct identities which will confer on them "relative autonomy" within a social order fractured by class, generational differences, work etc.'[2] is the most suitable definition for demonstrating how beboppers, at a time of economic austerity and clothes rationing, utilised the limited resources available to them to collectively construct style and meaning within the post-war moment.

With regard to 'bebop', Kenny Clarke, one of the first wave of drummers to play the style, recalled that the term was coined by the press: 'Bebop was a label that certain journalists later gave it, but we never labelled the music', Clarke has explained. 'It was just modern music, we

[1] Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson (eds.), *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), p. 1.

[2] Dick Hebdige, 'The Function of Subculture', in Simon During (ed.), *Cultural Studies Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 441–450 (p. 441).

would call it. We wouldn't call it anything, really, just music.'[3] *Melody Maker* music journalist Seymour Wise was amongst the first English writers on bebop. Wise described the music as 'an entirely new jazz medium, a style based on augmented chords, elaborate phrases apparently unconnected to each other, departing from the traditional use of chord progressions, assimilating fabulous technique and drive, while disregarding conventional jazz accentuation'.[4] Wise's definition is most appropriate for this book. However, it is important to note that I am not a musicologist. The book seeks to unravel the myriad social, cultural and political codes that became embedded within the music once it migrated to Britain and landed in Soho. As elucidated by Clarke, the music as made by its New York originators was labelled by the media. The following chapters in this book are very much more interested in demonstrating how the label 'bebop' became a metaphor in Soho for myriad other meanings.

'Soho', meanwhile, is a spatial location situated in the borough of Westminster, in the centre of London, bordered by Shaftesbury Avenue to the south, Oxford Street to the north, Regent Street to the west and Charing Cross Road to the east. The area signifies, however, and always has signified, more than merely a topographical location. Judith Walkowitz defines Soho as an area whose 'geographic and social identity has always been more mobile, fluid, and contested than … mappings of Soho would suggest'.[5] This definition of Soho best captures the themes of this research.

Contribution to Knowledge

Histories of Jazz in Britain

There are several existing histories of jazz in Britain. Jim Godbolt's *Jazz in Britain: 1919–1950* (1984), George McKay's *Circular Breathing: The Cultural Politics of Jazz in Britain* (2005), Catherine Tackley's *The Evolution of Jazz in Britain: 1880–1935* (2005), Hilary Moore's *Inside British Jazz: Crossing Borders of Race, Nation and Class* (2007), Duncan

[3] Paul Du Noyer, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Music* (London: Flame Tree Publishing, 2003), p. 130.

[4] Seymour Wise, 'What is Bebop?', *Melody Maker*, 31 August 1946, p. 5.

[5] Judith Walkowitz, *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 18.

Heining's *Trad Dads, Dirty Boppers and Free Fusioneers, British Jazz, 1960–1975* (2012), Dave Gelly's *Jazz in Britain and its Audience: 1945–1960* (2014), and Jason Toynbee, Catherine Tackley and Mark Doffman's *Black British Jazz: Routes, Ownership and Performance* (2014) all make significant contributions to the history of British jazz.

However, no single book deals specifically with British bebop. While Godbolt's account presents a comprehensive look at jazz from its introduction to Britain, including early definitions of the term, key players and the various genres of the music, he dedicates only one chapter to bebop in 1940s London. Not only that, but Godbolt, like most other writers on British jazz, privileges 1948 as the starting point of bebop in Britain. While his portrait of the participating musicians in his story is accurate, he overlooks a whole racial demographic that contributed to early British bebop, and does not include the first bebop club in Britain in his story, which started developing the music in late 1945 and early 1946.

McKay's work is concerned with jazz and the politics of race. His book focuses specifically on 'jazz accompaniment to protests at Aldermaston and jazz festivals such as Beaulieu'.[6] However, although the book is not about bebop in particular, when McKay does mention the idiom he, like Godbolt, suggests that a group of musicians pioneered the music at a specific club in Britain in 1948, and then proceeds to discuss bebop players in terms of the 1950s.

Tackley's book is also highly informative, tracing the trajectory of jazz in Britain, but concludes in 1935; while Heining—although observant on some aspects of the bebop scene in 1940s London—provides a 'more documentary and anecdotal report … illustrating the different jazz venues utilised by trad and modern jazz musicians, and alluding to the importance of the Little Theatre Club and Ronnie Scott's "Old Place" in the development of British Free Jazz'.[7] These clubs, however, did not open until the 1950s.

Hilary Moore's study is concerned with jazz in Britain and its relation to race, nation and class. Her text does cover some features of the 1940s, in particular the renowned venue for George Webb's Dixieland band, the Red Barn, in Barnehurst, Kent, but is only concerned with the trad jazz from that period.

[6] Katherine Williams, 'Post-World War II Jazz in Britain: Venues and Values, 1945–1970', *Jazz Research Journal*, 113, 2014, pp. 113–131 (p. 115).

[7] Ibid.

Toynbee, Tackley and Doffman's narrative periodises specific moments in black British jazz. While their book is an important contribution that details musical hybridity and the cultural significance of race, 1940s bebop is overlooked in their story. This is perhaps due to the exclusion, found in most other literature concerning British jazz, of the black contribution to bebop in 1940s Britain from most dominant narratives.

Dave Gelly, on the other hand, does touch upon the history of early British bebop. His text is precise in terms of particular historical dates, venues and geographical locality with regard to the starting point of bebop in Britain. However, like Godbolt, Gelly dedicates only one chapter of his book to bebop, and moreover his overall view is discursive and does not offer an in-depth academic analysis of the scene and the culture that formed around it.

The first aim of this book, therefore, is to fill these gaps and offer a full and comprehensive history of the bebop scene in Soho between 1945 and 1950, insofar as the sources allow, and to demonstrate that the music was pioneered by both black and white artists in transracial bands at the clubs.

Histories of Post-War Youth Subcultures in Britain

There have been several histories of youth subcultures in Britain. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (1975), Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) and Sarah Thornton's *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (1995) were important foundational texts, followed by David Muggleton's *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style* (2000), Andy Bennett's *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual* (2004), Rupa Huq's *Beyond Subculture: Pop, Youth and Identity in a Postcolonial World* (2006) and Peter Webb et al.'s *Hebdige and Subculture in the Twenty-first Century: Through the Subcultural Lens* (2020). All these texts offer academic analysis of the history of British youth subcultures.

The writers of *Resistance through Rituals* founded the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS; along with Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams), and their outstanding work on youth subcultures was pioneering. Specifically concerned with class struggle and primarily focusing on white working-class youths, the approach of the CCCS, mainly via a semiotics framework, positions subcultures as resisting the dominant culture through symbolic style.

Hebdige further developed the CCCS's approach. However, he was not wholly concerned with class, but rather was more interested in style, principally arguing that subcultural youths are bricoleurs. The collective work of the CCCS takes the 1950s as the starting point of post-war youth subcultures in Britain. Beginning with the Teds, they work their way through specific historical moments, including the emergence of mods, skinheads, punks and Rastas, and the social, political and economic contexts in which they materialised.

Sarah Thornton's text represents a shift in technique and perspective away from the CCCS approach. In producing an innovative study of the acid house and rave scenes of the late 1980s and early 1990s, Thornton conducted ethnographic research and drew from the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. She reads youth subcultures as being marked by 'distinctions' of taste. For example, in assimilating Bourdieu's theory of 'cultural capital' into her story and re-purposing the term as 'subcultural capital', Thornton demonstrated how 'insiders … both distinguish themselves from outsiders and internally differentiate themselves from others', and display 'authenticity through knowledge of, and commitment to, their scene'.[8] Thornton's analysis also revealed how 'Niche media like the music press construct subcultures as much as they document them. National mass media, such as the tabloids, develop youth movements as much as they distort them.'[9]

Muggleton and Bennett's work, on the other hand, applies a postmodern approach to subcultures, inferring that they are more fragmentary, and that they 'react imaginatively through consumption and identity to construct creative meanings that can be liberating from subordination. Postmodern subcultural theory seeks to move away from models of social constraint and places greater emphasis on agency in the search for individual meaning in subcultural practice.'[10]

None of these histories include 1940s bebop and beboppers in their stories. Not only that, but classic subculture histories *Resistance Through Rituals* and *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* both exclude women from their canon. With regard to race, both the CCCS and Thornton posit

[8] Patrick Williams, 'Youth-Subcultural Studies: Sociological Traditions and Core Concepts,' *Sociology Compass*, 2007, pp. 572–593 (p. 586).

[9] Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), p. 117.

[10] Shane Blackman, 'Youth Subcultural Theory: A Critical Engagement with the Concept, its Origins and Politics from the Chicago School to Postmodernism', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8:1, 2005, pp. 1–20 (p. 8).

subcultures along racial lines as mainly white, although Hebdige emphasises the influence of black cultural styles on white youth subcultures, and Thornton acknowledges that subcultures are not strictly delineated along class lines.

The second aim of this book, then, is to show that the bebop scene in Soho, 1945 to 1950, was Britain's first post-war youth subculture. The book also contends that beboppers blurred the boundaries between race, class and gender: it seeks to demonstrate that black men and white women were both an integral part of the bebop scene in post-war Soho.

Hebdige and Thornton's texts are the most suitable models for the purposes of this book: thus, I draw from their theories and apply the necessary strands to my narrative. In this way, the book seeks to hone the 'classic' approach to subcultures.

Methodology and Approach

The methodology is archival and interdisciplinary. The interdisciplinary approach draws from fields of cultural studies, racial and ethnic studies, music studies, fashion studies, media studies and subculture studies. The methods consist of extensive historical primary research that I have undertaken at specialist archives including the British Library in London, the National Jazz Archive in Loughton, Essex, the Bishopsgate Institute in London, the Black Cultural Archive in Brixton, London, and the British Newspaper Archive. The majority of the primary sources are historical reports in the music press—many of them hitherto unexplored—and clippings from the popular press. In addition to this, I have gleaned a wide range of oral history accounts from the British Library's National Sound Archive project, *Oral Histories of Jazz in Britain*, as well as local newspaper articles, interviews, police reports, photographs and extremely rare autobiographies written by eyewitnesses to the bebop scene in post-war Soho.

As newspaper reports comprise a major part of the primary sources utilised in this book, it is important to note that they constitute a discourse and are therefore not neutral. They embody their own biases and do so for a multitude of reasons. These biases are reflected through the agendas of the owners, the implied readerships, the limited spaces that writers are allocated within newspapers and the views of the journalists. Furthermore, the experience of reading newspaper articles is not the same for everyone. Social class, race, gender, sexuality and religion can all influence and shape

the way in which knowledge is consumed and interpreted. John Richardson has argued that 'textual meaning is *constructed* through an interaction between producer, text and consumer rather than simply being read off the page by all readers in exactly the same way'.[11] This is due to the fact that, as David Machin has noted, 'people from different cultures will interpret and experience [media products] differently'.[12] The other sources I have utilised—oral histories, police reports, autobiographies and interviews—are likewise not neutral. All of my sources, therefore, will be treated critically.[13]

An interdisciplinary approach to the material is the most suitable methodology for the purposes of my book. Lisa Lattuca has argued that the 'exponential growth of knowledge in the twentieth century revealed how disciplinary cultures and perspectives could discourage inquiries and explanations that spanned disciplinary boundaries. Disciplines, it now seems clear, are powerful but constraining ways of knowing.'[14] Interdisciplinarity, therefore, has the power to 'interrupt disciplinary discourse and to challenge traditional notions of knowledge and scholarship'.[15]

The Chapters

Chapter 2 is about place. It sets the scene and contextualises Soho, mapping not only the social, cultural and historical importance of the area prior to the bebop scene, but also the district's spatial significance. Utilising a wide range of primary and secondary sources, the chapter shows how the area evolved into a melting-pot of multinational and transracial peoples during the period from the nineteenth century to 1945.

During the nineteenth century, the redevelopment of London's West End saw the construction of Soho's surrounding commercial thoroughfares—Oxford Street, Regent Street, Charing Cross Road and Shaftesbury

[11] John Richardson, *Analysing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Red Globe Press, 2007), p. 15.

[12] David Machin and Theo van Leeuwen, *Global Media Discourse: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), p. 1.

[13] See Matthew Partington and Lisa Sandino, *Oral History in the Visual Arts* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), for more information on how oral histories contain their own biases.

[14] Lisa Latucca, *Creating Interdisciplinarity: Interdisciplinary Research and Teaching among College and University Faculty* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2001), p. 2.

[15] Ibid.

Avenue. This renovation project, a symbol of imperial power, sharply contrasted with the square mile's tightly woven web of streets, thus helping to contain the independent spirit and the unique cosmopolitan culture that began to flourish there. People from across the globe gravitated to Soho to let their hair down and indulge in the area's exotic hedonisms. Chapter 2, therefore, critically explores how various medias, mediums and material forms imagined Soho as London's cosmopolis and as a carnivalesque place of transgressive cultural pleasures. Bakhtin's notion of the carnival is utilised to emphasise these ideas.

During the interwar years, Soho was also the site of many short-lived jazz clubs. This chapter details the various peoples and types of music of the African diaspora that migrated to Soho and found expression within these spaces, as well as the radical racial politics that arose in them. In the 1930s the area was also awash with 'bottle parties', a term used to describe after-hours drinking dens. The chapter examines archival and historical reports in the newspapers and shows how the latter imagined Soho as a space where dominant social values were upended.

Finally, Chap. 2 shows how during the Second World War, amidst the blackout and the Blitz, African American servicemen gravitated to Soho, adding to the transracial cosmopolitan melting-pot that comprised the area's streets, courtyards and alleyways. Once they landed there, they formed an integral part of the burgeoning swing scene, before the advent of the avant-garde musical form bebop.

Chapter 3 captures the birth of a scene. It documents and analyses bebop and the point at which the music migrated to Britain at the end of the Second World War, where it landed in Soho. The chapter details the roots, routes and flows of the music as it came into the area from New York, and the small network of people that embraced it, developing the scene locally in the area's gritty basement clubs. These clubs—the Fullado Club (1945/6–1947), the Metropolitan Bopera House (1948), the Feldman Club (1948), Club Eleven (1948–1950) and the Paramount Dance Hall (1947–1950)—and the musicians and fans that created these spaces, are explored in detail.

Perhaps as important, though, is that the chapter demonstrates how bebop—a transatlantic and transnational cultural form—became reshaped locally once it was transferred to Britain and its Soho setting. This, the chapter argues, was due to various musicians from across the continents of Europe, Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas converging to play the music. The chapter argues that bebop in Soho was a transcultural

phenomenon, a music of the 'Black Atlantic', characterised by cross-fertilisation and transracial exchange. In so doing, the chapter challenges received cultural narratives that erase the contribution by black musicians from the history of early British bebop by claiming that modern jazz was pioneered, in the beginning, mainly by white musicians. Additionally, the chapter shows that once the music spread beyond the boundaries of Soho, due to the transracial exchange and cultural symbolism evoked by beboppers, the music was banned in suburban dance halls and by the BBC.

Chapter 4 analyses the men's and women's fashion that signalled the beboppers' identity in the post-war moment, distinguishing them from trad jazz fans and wider society in general. Although the New York pioneers were associated with a fashion specific to bebop, across the Atlantic in London the style was articulated differently.[16] This look, the first in post-war Britain to be affiliated with a specific type of music, was also the first in post-war Britain to be cobbled together into a coherent semiotic style and thereby to communicate resistance. Moreover, this look was influenced by a number of images embedded in popular culture.[17]

In terms of the men's style, many of these images were fashioned bodies drawn from the iconography of American gangster films, transmitted in cinemas in London's West End. Some were inspired by movies and musicals depicting black American jazz. Others had their roots in post-war spiv culture—a group of black-market hustlers around Soho during and after the war who were often represented in the popular press as a threat to national identity. The chapter shows how the male beboppers took strands from all of these seemingly disparate styles and fused them together to create their own unique aesthetic. In this regard, the work of Hebdige is important for an analysis of semiotic style, as is that of Thornton for demonstrating that the media documents, transmits and distorts subcultures, thereby helping to develop them. Additionally, the chapter grounds the primary research in fashion theory—especially the work of Crane, Entwistle, Simmel, Kuchta, Breward and Barnard—in order to

[16] Much evidence exists showing Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk and the other legends of bebop wearing dark glasses, berets and goatee beards. No photographic evidence exists showing the London beboppers wearing hats of this type, or beards. Therefore, this suggests that the English visual style that signalled the beboppers' identity in post-war London was markedly different to that of their New York counterparts.

[17] The images that influenced the bebop look were diverse and derived from cinema: gangster films, both American and British, and mainly American musicals depicting black jazz culture.

demonstrate that this style reversed the way in which fashion was historically diffused: rather than flowing from the top of society downwards, the bebop look 'bubbled up' from the ground.

In terms of the female beboppers, the chapter shows how their style, a type of sleek black modern chic, possibly inspired by Dior's 'New Look' of 1947, and also involving black drainpipe jeans, monochrome sweaters and dark sunglasses, distinguished them from female trad jazz fans and provided them with a sense of agency and independence.

Chapter 5 continues with the themes of female agency, cultural hybridity and improvisation, developing these notions further, but the chapter is also about fear. Between 1947 and 1950, the Fullado Club (1947), Club Eleven (1950) and the Paramount Dance Hall (1950) were raided by police. The former two clubs were closed down permanently, and the latter, when it reopened, banned bebop from being played live. The chapter presents hitherto unexplored archival reports from the music press, police reports and oral history accounts of the raids by eyewitnesses, shedding light on the cultural processes shaping the clubs on the nights in question.

While on the surface the clubs were raided due to the perceived threat of drug dealing and drug use, the chapter explores the underlying fears concerning not only the social make-up of the clubs but also the dancing within these spaces. The chapter demonstrates that these fears were racialised, gendered and rooted in the imperial power structure, and thus projected by the media. Not only the transracial cross-gender fraternising, but bebop music itself and the fashioned bodies that constituted the scene posed a threat to British social values and the image of a national identity. The work of Stuart Hall and Ben-Yehuda is utilised to critically interpret the structural implications of the police raids on the clubs.

Chapter 6 assesses the social, cultural and historical impact of the raids on the Soho bebop clubs at the beginning of the 1950s, exploring a number of ideas. Contextualising the social and political transformations during that decade, the chapter maps the changes in popular culture more generally and shows how Soho was the epicentre of the teenage revolution. Skiffle, rock 'n' roll and trad jazz, for instance, were all burgeoning scenes in Britain during that decade, but nowhere were they more conspicuous than in the coffee shops and clubs of Soho.

In exploring these various cultural forms in relation to bebop, the chapter critically examines the modern jazz scene's continuous role within the popular culture landscape of the area in the 1950s, and explores the influence of beboppers on the Teds and the mods' subcultures. In addition to

this, in critically examining bebop in Soho at the dawn of the new decade, the chapter looks at the live scene, record labels and the rise of Tin Pan Alley during the 1950s and early 1960s.

Having explored the hidden history of the bebop scene in post-war Soho through this wide range of sources, many of which have not previously been researched, Chap. 7 asks the question, is this a subculture? In this way, the book is brought to a natural conclusion.

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CHAPTER 2

Contextualising Soho, 1800–1945

Introduction

Soho is a neighbourhood situated in the centre of London, renowned for its pulsing nightlife. The city's cultural heartbeat, the district has historically been home to myriad clubs and niteries, many of which were underground spaces located within the tightly woven web of streets threaded throughout the area. In terms of Soho's social geography, immigrants from across the globe, artists, musicians, aristocrats, bohemians, criminals, drug addicts, dealers, prostitutes and political activists have all shared a collective space within the community, socially and culturally intersecting with club owners, restaurateurs, waiters and waitresses, street traders and tailors, dating back to the seventeenth century.

Through a synthesis of archival and historical primary sources drawn from local and national newspapers, oral histories, social and cultural histories and academic journal articles, this chapter will first demonstrate how Soho came to be known as London's cosmopolitan centre, and how the mixture of multinational and multiracial people shared the social, economic and cultural spaces of the area. Next, the chapter explores how Soho's unique culture was contained by its physical and geographical boundaries, and how the area's commercial and modernised outer borders helped to construct Soho's uniqueness. Following that, the chapter demonstrates how Soho can be seen as a *carnivalesque space*: a space where, in

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Bakhtin's terms, transgressive behaviour upends the dominant social order. Finally, I paint a picture of Soho during the Second World War and the popular music—swing and Dixieland jazz—that permeated musical tastes before the advent of bebop in late 1945 and early 1946.

Soho: London's Cosmopolis

There is a large degree of historical continuity from the seventeenth century until the present day in terms of Soho's physical form and shape. This is noted by Judith Walkowitz (2012) who claims that: 'Soho's street patterns would persist into the twenty-first century, but Soho's geographic and social identity has always been more mobile, fluid, and contested than … mappings of Soho would suggest'.[1] During the seventeenth century St Anne Soho was one of the wealthier parishes in London due to the members of the aristocracy that lived in the area.[2] However, when 'the cholera epidemics … afflicted London, between 1831 and 1866' many of the landed classes vacated the district (Fig. 2.1).[3]

Soho's boundaries have, in fact, transmuted throughout history, owing to roadways, the development of business and the ways in which governmental and philanthropic institutions have overlapped and changed. The area's formal borders 'also shifted in reaction to changing social usages and informal annexations of contiguous spaces by Sohoites'.[4] According to Walkowitz, during the decades preceding the twentieth century, a space was opened up and dedicated to multicultural consumption, constructed along the street developments of Regent Street, Shaftesbury Avenue, Charing Cross Road and the older vicinities of Oxford Street and Leicester Square. These thoroughfares not only helped to produce Soho's modern identity, they also created a space for commercial and industrial development: 'Nineteenth-century thoroughfares ripped through the central rookeries of Old London', says Walkowitz, 'displacing thousands of residents from the noisome slums that resisted police supervision. Simultaneously, they transported new social actors into the district,

[1] Walkowitz, p. 18.

[2] Peter Atkins, 'The Spatial Configuration of Class Solidarity in London's West End, 1729–1939', *Urban History*, 17, 1990, pp. 35–36 (p. 35).

[3] Stephen Halliday, 'Death and Miasma in Victorian London: An Obstinate Belief', *BMJ*, 323:7327, 2001, pp. 1469–471 (p. 1469).

[4] Walkowitz, p. 18.

Fig. 2.1 A scene at night of Berwick Street Market, in the heart of Soho, doing a brisk trade just before Christmas. (Credit: Mary Evans Picture Library)

including legions of service and theatrical workers who assisted and entertained suburbanites and tourists descending on the West End to visit the shops and the shows.'[5]

In terms of the area's social milieu, Soho encompassed a wide range of cultural identities from Europe and beyond, blurring the lines between race, gender, class and ethnicity. Jerry White (2008) points out that Soho continued to be the main cosmopolitan locality of central London at the end of the nineteenth century. Initially including a large French population, by the 1890s the 'French hold was beginning to slip … [they] were not even the largest minority in Soho in the late 1890s—there were 900 French to over 1,000 Germans … with recent influxes of Jews (about 700), Italians (650) and Swiss (260). Even Swedes, Norwegians and

[5] Ibid.